

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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NO. 43.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

From the Universalist Magazine.

SOME REMARKS

On the Rev. JOSEPH P. FESSENDEN's Sermon, delivered at Arundel, Me. September 10, 1820, in vindication of the doctrine of Election.

This sermon was sent to us from our friend at Saco, with a request that some remarks might be made on it, and published in the Magazine.

Although the doctrine of Election, as held by our orthodox clergy, has been refuted times without number, yet as it continues to have a few advocates, and as many are blinded by it, we deem it needful to render a few reasons why we cannot agree with Mr. Fessenden; hoping that thereby we may unburden some afflicted minds of a sentiment, which is a perpetual torment to all who are deceived by it. We say, that this doctrine is a perpetual torment to those who are deceived by it: for a doctrine must be a torment to its believer, if it contains that which the believer of it is sorry to have true. Now if Mr. Fessenden had told the good people of Arundel, that his heart and soul rejoiced in the belief that a few only of the human family were designed by the Deity for eternal happiness, and that the greatest part were appointed to a state of endless misery, what would they have called him? A good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of eternal life? Would they have exclaimed; "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him which bringeth good tidings"? Would they have wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth?—

Would they have said; this seems like the testimony of the angels to the shepherds; "Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people"? No; but they would have told him, that if he was glad that a great part of mankind were decreed for eternal misery, and if *his god* were of the same mind, and if the devil was likewise pleased with having it so, then,

of course, they were, in this respect, all of one mind! But deceit is always employed in the cause of error. The devil did not sow the tares among the wheat while the men were awake. Men are awake when they know that an enemy is nigh; they sleep when they are surrounded, as they think, with their friends. They are in the habit of believing those their friends, who pretend to be concerned for their everlasting salvation; and with them they sleep, or, what is the same, they take their word without examination, and in so doing they receive error. But there were some people at Arundel, who heard the sermon of which we speak, that were so much awake as to see that the preacher contradicted himself. Contradiction is Satan's *cloven foot*; he was a liar from the beginning; that doctrine, therefore, that contradicts itself, belongs not to the God of truth, but the father of lies.

One of the reasons which the preacher assigns for publishing the sermon, is, because some of the people of Arundel said that it contained contradictions. By this we learn, that the people could see contradictions where the preacher thought himself to be consistent; and we are willing, charitably to believe, that he was blind to his own errors and contradictions.

Reader look at the following statement, which is found on the 6th page of this sermon:

"In consequence of the fall of Adam, sin entered the world, and all his posterity inherit a depraved and corrupt nature, and from their birth, are under the wrath and curse of God."

This bold assertion, stated on no authority but the simple word of the preacher, without even an effort to prove it true, in any possible way, is the first stone in this immense fabrick, called the doctrine of election! Concerning this statement it may be said, with the utmost propriety, that were it true it would give no support to the

doctrine which the preacher has built upon it; much less can it give such support, being altogether false. If all men do inherit from Adam's first sin a depraved nature, it must be so by the ordination and appointment of God; for nothing is more plain than that Adam had neither skill nor power to cause his act to alter the nature of his posterity. Let the nature therefore of man be as it may, as it is just what God constituted it, it cannot be subject to his wrath and curse merely because it is what infinite wisdom and almighty power constituted it. For the correctness of these observations, we appeal to reason and common sense, a resort which is justified by the total silence of scripture on this particular. "And from their birth are under the wrath and curse of God." The infant, as soon as it is born, is under the wrath and curse of God! Readers, what do you think of those preachers, who, without any scripture to support them, boldly assert this abominable absurdity? Let us observe the difference between this perverse, this wicked conduct, and that heavenly treatment manifested by our blessed Saviour, when he took little children in his arms and blessed them, and said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." Can both these declarations be true? Can little children be under God's wrath and curse, and at the same time be of the kingdom of heaven? No; then which are we to believe?

How does this preacher know, that children as soon as they are born, are under God's wrath and curse? We must indulge ourselves a little in setting forth the absurdity of this declaration. Suppose then that it is true; what better condition could infants be in, than to be under God's wrath and curse? How could they be better dealt by? Surrounded by parental love, warmed in the soft bosom of maternal affection, they instinctively imbibe the life-sustaining nourishment which the God of nature has richly and most kindly pro-

vided, and all their wants are duly regarded by the most watchful solicitude. Is this God's wrath and curse? Yes; it is all the wrath and curse which God hath manifested towards little children.

But why does our preacher say; "as soon as they are born?" Why not before they are born? If it be any recommendation to the character of God to exercise his wrath and curse on infants as soon as they are born, why would such recommendation not be a little improved by supposing that he hates the infant even before it is born?

Look on the other hand. If God did really love little children, what better could he do for them than he now does?

"2. Although such was the undone, and miserable condition of our race, God sent his son to make atonement for the sins of the world. By his sufferings and death, Christ magnified the holy law and made it honourable; and consecrated a way, whereby God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The atonement is infinitely full; so that every man in the world, if he will repent and believe, may be pardoned and saved.

"3. Notwithstanding this full and complete atonement is made, and a gracious offer of pardon and eternal life is freely made to all men, yet, they universally and most ungratefully spurn, and reject it. They all, with one consent, make excuses, and will not come to the Saviour that they might have life. They obstinately persist in their rebellion and enmity, and would all thus continue to do, and miserably perish in their iniquities, unless something more were performed to prevent their ruin.

"4. This dreadful consequence God is determined to prevent. He will not suffer all, thus madly to destroy themselves. Accordingly he sends forth his spirit, renews and sanctifies a part of them, and makes them meet for his heavenly kingdom. This number is a definite number. He knows just how many, and the individual persons, whom he will save.

"5. In this, God acts from design. Who are to be saved, and who lost is not with him a matter of indifference. He formed his purpose to renew, sanctify and glorify a part of our sinful race. 'This purpose was an eternal

purpose—an eternal irrevocable decree.'

"6. In his eternal purpose to save one part of mankind rather than another part, God is governed by a wise regard to his own good pleasure. He does not save one part rather than another, because one part is, by nature, better than another. By nature, the elect are just as bad as the non-elect. At the time the purpose was formed to save them, they were not in existence and had not done neither good nor evil. As soon as they were born, they became the implacable enemies of God and such continued, hardening their hearts, rejecting the Saviour, till they were regenerated. It could not therefore have been out of a regard to any good thing in them, that they were taken and others left. But in their salvation, God must have been governed by a wise regard to his own good pleasure.

"This we believe to be what the scriptures mean by the doctrine of election. In the order of divine purposes, it stands as follows, God determined to create men. Foreseeing that they would fall into sin, he determined to give his Son, as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and that through him, the offer of salvation should be made to all indiscriminately; only on condition of repentance and faith. And, foreseeing that this gracious offer would be, universally, and most ungratefully, rejected, he determined to 'have mercy on whom he would have mercy,' and accordingly 'chose a part of the human race to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth.'

We propose making a few remarks, designed to signify wherein we disapprove Mr. Fessenden's statements above quoted. At some future time we may attempt to examine the arguments which he uses for the support of his doctrine.

1. We disapprove the statements because, to our apprehension, they represent our heavenly Father as the most cruel being in the universe. According to these statements, the Creator knew before he brought mankind into being, that a large portion of the human family would be endlessly miserable—and that he so determined from all eternity. Now if this does not de-

termine a character of infinite cruelty, we acknowledge that we are blind.—According to these statements it was God's *good pleasure*, that his creatures should be most deplorably wretched, as long as he shall remain Supreme Ruler of all things. We call on the believers of this doctrine to show, if they can, that this is not cruelty. And then we humbly request them to inform us what real cruelty is. In eternity before creation, if God knew that if he created man, he would sin and be endlessly miserable, he might at that time have determined to create no such race of beings. Or he might have determined to create no more than he decreed to make for ever happy. But no; it was his *good pleasure* to create men for eternal torment! Blessed be God, we do not believe it.

2. We disapprove these statements because they contain the absurd opinion, that God sent his son to make an atonement for the sins of all those, whom he determined, from all eternity, should be sinners eternally, and miserable as long. If this be not absurdity, we call on those who are capable of doing it, to shew us that it is a reasonable proposition; and also to explain to us the nature of an absurdity, so that we may understand how to apply terms to their proper subjects.

3. These statements are exceptionable on account of the manifest deceit and hypocrisy, which they suppose are practised on the miserable subjects, whom God has, without any reason, only his *good pleasure*, doomed to endless misery. This deceit and hypocrisy are seen in the following; "This full and complete atonement is made, and a gracious offer of pardon and eternal life is freely made to all men." What, does our Creator, even before we exist, determine that we shall eternally rebel against him, and in consequence of this rebellion be for ever miserable, and then does he come to us with a free offer of pardon and eternal life? If this be not deceit and hypocrisy we call on those who are able, to show wherein it is not, and also to explain to us the attributes which ought to be signified by these terms.

4. We cannot believe, as is set forth in the above extract, that men, "as soon as they are born, become the implacable enemies of God." To us

there is no more propriety in believing an infant to be an enemy to God as soon as it is born, than in believing that it was an enemy to God before it was born, or before its parents were born. What sense is there in such statements? The infant never heard of a God—does not know that there is one in the universe: how then can it be an enemy to what it never thought of? But this preacher says that we are *implacable* enemies as soon as we are born. If this be true, it is a fact that this enmity must always last, for that which is *implacable* cannot be placated!

Reader, we have no expectation that the abettors of these erroneous notions will ever undertake to answer these queries, but we submit them for your consideration, that you may know and pity the folly of your fellow creatures, and do all in your power to enlighten them, and show them the wrongs and the blasphemies of their errors.

We shall notice this preacher's reasoning in a future number.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, May 26, 1821.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

TO THE EDITOR,

DEAR SIR,—The enclosed communication, in the form of a dialogue, is submitted for insertion, if it pass the test of your approbation. Not having seen any thing in this form in any numbers of the Messenger which I have perused,* I presumed it might be acceptable. But even on submitting it, I almost tremble at the responsibility I assume; because it is very possible that through my want of discernment, and being but just initiated into gospel knowledge, my arguments may injure rather than subserve the cause I would advocate. I however feel encouraged to proceed, as the measure will accelerate my own growth in divine things: and as I am not tenacious of their publica-

* "X" will find one lengthy dialogue on this subject in the first volume of the Messenger, taken from the Universalist Magazine, and another real conversation between the Editor and a Methodist: but nevertheless, as we have now many new subscribers, this dialogue is very acceptable.

ED.

tion, if they should not be judged worthy, you will give no offence by decreeing their "quietus." X

DIALOGUES are, and ever have been a favourite and successful method of exhibiting truth; indeed, if properly managed, it is impossible they should be otherwise, because they are presumed to consist of the best arguments which the parties opposed, are capable of advancing in support of their particular tenets. It matters not whether they be a specific relation of an actual controversy, or such as may be fairly imagined to occur;—provided the writer who is real, treat his supposed opponent with that candour and liberality which every disputant would desire to be shown to himself.

What may now, and at proper intervals be attempted in this way, will partake partly of both kinds—that is, real and supposed conversation; the latter shall be used as a necessary resort in maintaining regularity and connexion throughout the whole; giving in such cases every advantage to my opposer which he would actually claim; and who, though he be named in the singular, is intended to represent that plurality of opponents, every day and every where to be found, zealously opposing the truth. I shall introduce him to my reader under the name of Limitarian, and myself under that of Universalist.

Our first interview was rather incidental. After the usual salutations, my friend Limitarian exclaimed,—

Limitarian. I regret to hear that you should have suffered yourself to depart from the principles of our excellent Confession of Faith,—that in doing this, you have become a Universalist,—a denier of the holy doctrine of the Trinity,—that you dispute the necessity and efficacy of the atonement,—the work of God upon the heart,—and while you thus open the flood gates of licentiousness, you consequently have become an unbeliever in divine revelation. Now, had your departures from truth, been weighable only in the balances of non-essentials, it would not have excited so much surprise and anxiety. But learning that you deny those fundamental points, on which only, man can place any proper hope, my grief is awakened in a degree proportioned to

the nature of your apostacy from the true faith.

Universalist. Sensible that I have hitherto been a sharer in your christian regards, I feel pained that any events predicated on facts, or any unfounded rumours respecting myself, should in any wise militate against your peace of mind. Meanwhile, candour and truth obliges me to state, that I do most conscientiously dissent from many of the dogmas of Orthodoxy, to which ignorance and educational prejudice led me to subscribe. But that the consequence you have inferred, that is, that I am a sceptic respecting divine revelation, is true, I must disavow, at least, until by reason, and especially by scripture, you shall have justified, or demonstrated your assertion.

Lim. I readily agree, that scripture is the only sure touchstone by which to try our ideas of divinity; and that reason is its best auxiliary. But how often do the enemies of truth wrest them from their legitimate application, merely to establish sentiments of the most pernicious tendency; and unless your reliance on the scriptures, is founded upon such a use of them, I am quite sure that your appeal to their sacred testimony, will prove the fallacy of those opinions, which perhaps a native proneness to speculate in points of theology, and the hearing of false teachers, have induced you to embrace. As for reason exclusively, in matters so momentous, while I own its value in its proper place, yet I believe it may, like many other of heaven's blessings, be transformed into a curse. If we select it alone, as the basis of our religious philosophy, we may persuade ourselves out of almost any position, however well demonstrated. Nay, to prove the error of making it a rule by which to limit our faith, I would ask, do we not every moment feel ourselves obliged to believe, what our reason cannot comprehend?

Uni. Nothing is more true, than that error is zealously supported by scripture quotations. Satan was not ignorant of the potency of this measure; for he also said thus, "it is written." And, is any thing more natural for those who are employed in contrasting what they denominate the almost universal extent and eternal duration of his dominion, with the diminutive em-

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pire of Jesus, than to do likewise? What you have said relative to the individual efficiency of reason, and of its improper use, has my assent, with this additional observation,—that whatever is contrary to reason, and entirely unsupported by human conceptions, or any kind of testimony, but is invalidated by both, or either the analogy of scripture or natural and visible things, must be rejected as chimerical, and can have no claim upon our credence.—With your approbation of this last remark, we shall be agreed upon a foundation upon which to rest all parts of our subsequent controversy.

Lim. This last remark of yours is rather new, but so far as I can discern its drift, it appears unobjectionable. You talk of a subsequent controversy, and have already laid down the platform of the work. This was far from my original design. When I spoke so plainly at the first, I only did it, to warn you of your awful departure from the fundamental and plain truths of the bible; as not being able to reconcile it to my conscience, to let sin rest upon a fallen brother. Nevertheless, as you appear to be both determined and conscientious in your new gotten, and to me fearful sentiments, I will not refuse to argue the several points of doctrine, about which we are at variance, upon the basis you have proposed. Though this is entering upon unexpected business, yet, besides your invitation, I am thereto induced by the following considerations. First, Because it is a divine injunction, that we should "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Secondly, It is a christian duty incumbent on me toward you, as one backslidden from the truth; and, Thirdly, because scripture, the compass by which we mutually agree to be guided, will be so abundantly conclusive, in refuting the errors you seem so ardently to have embraced. But the incidental nature of this interview, forbids a further prosecution of our engagement at the present.

Uni. I feel obliged by your acquiescence, and hope you will do me the justice to believe, that I am not prompted by any improper desire of exhibiting my own ability in argument, neither with a hope of proselyting my friend. But as you hesitated not, upon this, the first opportunity you have had since my

change of sentiment, to anathematize me, as a heretic, and believing as I do, that you have never duly weighed the solid, nay insuperable objections, which even the weakest christian taught of God, can bring against your system, I wish an opportunity of showing you the ground of my hope, and if possible, to convince you that my doctrine does not necessarily forfeit my title to the name of a christian, nor constitute me a child of the devil. Besides, the character of my heavenly Father is dear to my soul, and I crave these means to rebut, so far as I may be able, those blasphemous aspersions which the creeds and confessions of the day, are constantly casting thereon. I shall not confidently predict, that the issue will be successful on my side, but with all the zeal which so good a cause can inspire me, and with the intention of being governed by christian courtesy and affection, I pledge my best efforts. Yielding to the pressure of present circumstances, I forbear annexing any other observations, and will be happy to proceed, whenever your pleasure shall indicate your readiness to continue the argument. (*To be continued.*)

RELIGION,

In stature, is supremely tall; her limbs and features in the most perfect symmetry; her air serenely awful, and her countenance comely; bearing the express image of youth and vigour and tinged with an unfading bloom.

She is the eldest daughter of an eternal Father; bearing in her person the most striking resemblance of all his attributes.

She is clothed in white; the original raiment in which her Father clothed her, and which is remarkable for two peculiar properties: endless duration, and an utter incapacity of receiving the least tarnish. [*N. Y. Gospel Herald.*]

RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE.

We are happy to inform our readers, that a new Society has been recently formed at Cambridgeport, professing the doctrine of Universal Salvation, through the divine favour, manifested in JESUS CHRIST, who is Lord of all; to whom every knee shall bow.

May the Father of mercies bless this new plantation with the dews of his grace, and the warming influence of the sun of righteousness.

[*Universalist Magazine.*]

ERRATUM.

In our last, page 168, col. 2, line 9, from the bottom, for they say, read he declares.

From the Universalist Magazine.

"The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works."—Ps. cxlv. 9.

"Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."—James i. 17.

CREATOR of our feeble race,
We praise the riches of thy grace;
Upon us may thy spirit rest,
And we be by its influence blest;
May ev'ry bosom feel its pow'r,
And join thy goodness to adore.

Where'er we turn our wandering eyes,
Whether to earth, or seas, or skies,
Thy works in glowing colours shine,
And silent speak of love divine.
The heavens, O Lord, declare this love,
The rain and snow thy goodness prove;
Tempests, wind, hail, and storms display,
Almighty God, thy boundless sway.
The lightning, darting through the skies
With glare terrific, meets the eye;
The thunder, rolling o'er our head,
And rumb'ling from its vap'rous bed,
Peal upon peal, in accents loud,
Bursts forth in vengeance from the cloud,
And seems as if 'twould lay our earth
In waste, as 'twas before its birth,
When the whole mass in chaos laid,
Formless and uncreated, void;
When darkness was upon the deep,
And all was still in nature's sleep.
Yet, Lord, these show thou'rt rich in grace,
And manifest, in every place,
That love and mercy deck thy throne,
And that thou wilt by them be known.

The golden sun shines from the east,
And we are with his presence blest;
And as our earth around him goes,
Upon her he his lustre throws;
Warm'd into life, she richly yields
The thousand blessings of her fields.
But when his daily course is o'er,
He blushes at the distant shore;
The western summits intervene,
And night begins to grace the scene.
When silence reigns with awe profound,
And darkness spreads its mantle round,
God's love's the same—the same his grace,
No darkness can obscure his face;
The same his pow'r our souls to guard,
The same his goodness to reward:
Night cannot keep us from his care,
For he is always where we are.

When the dark mantle of the tomb,
Shall cast around a sullen gloom;
When we beneath the sod are laid,
And earthly honours all are paid,
God still is ours—for Jesus said,
He's God of living and of dead.
Then shout aloud, and praise his name,
Our God forever is the same;
His mercy, goodness, grace and love
The whole creation joins to prove.

W.

PRINTING
Neatly executed at this office.